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## **REGIONAL CONFERENCE OF THE INTERNATIONAL GEOGRAPHICAL UNION: KRAKOW, POLAND, 18-22 AUGUST 2014**

**Marek Degórski**

Institute of Geography and Spatial Organization  
Polish Academy of Sciences  
Twarda 51/55, 00-818 Warsaw: Poland  
e-mail: [m.degorski@twarda.pan.pl](mailto:m.degorski@twarda.pan.pl)

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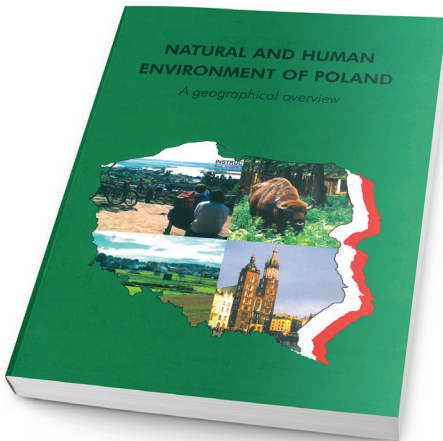
In 2014 Polish geographers had a reason to celebrate: on the 80th anniversary of the first IGU conference on Polish soil, the 1934 Congress in Warsaw, the country hosted an IGU Regional conference in Krakow. The patronage of Polish Presidents, Ignacy Mościcki in 1934 and Bronisław Komorowski in 2014, and the numbers of participants attested to the importance of the two events.

The idea of hosting a Regional IGU conference originated in the Polish Geographical Society in 2002. After securing approval and backing from the Committee of Geographical Sciences of the Polish Academy of Sciences (PAS), a relevant motion was submitted to IGU governing bodies during the Glasgow Congress in 2004. A favourable response came from Professor Ann Batimer, President of IGU's Executive Committee, and Professor Ronald Abler, Executive Secretary and Treasurer. In the same year,

a consortium was established to fund and organise the conference which comprised the Polish Geographical Society, the Institute of Geography and Spatial Organization PAS and the Jagiellonian, Warsaw and Silesian Universities. The consortium appointed a steering committee with Professor Marek Degórski as Chairman. During its ten years of existence the consortium expanded to include three more universities, i.e. the Pedagogical University of Krakow, Łódź University and the University of Poznań, which were also represented on the Steering Committee. The Committee did not limit itself to just conference organisation, but also promoted the achievements of Polish geographers at the main congresses before the Polish event, i.e. in Tunis (2008) (Fig. 1) and Cologne (2012), and at the regional conferences in Brisbane (2006), Tel Aviv (2010), Santiago de Chile (2011) and Kyoto (2013).



**Figure 1.** Professor M. Degórski manning a stand promoting Polish geography at the IGU Congress in Tunis (2008)



**Figure 2.** Cover of the book *Natural and human environment of Poland - A geographical overview* published for the IGU Regional Conference in Brisbane, Australia, 2006

The Steering Committee launched a comprehensive study on the human and physical geography of Poland, which was published in 2006. It was a collection of chapters written by eminent specialists on the various aspects and sub disciplines of geography. The volume has become a showcase of Polish geographic research and a reader on Poland for a broad spectrum of users, including those who found Poland a rather exotic country (Fig. 2). In this capacity it was put to good use during the IGU Regional Conference in Brisbane, Australia.

In 2008, the Steering Committee made the key decision to host the Regional Conference in Krakow. The recently built compound of the Institute of Geography and Spatial Management was selected as the main venue while the rest of the Jagiellonian University (JU) Campus was also used. At the IGU's Executive Committee meeting, held in Moscow on 5-8 May 2008, Profs. Bolesław Domański and Marek Degórski submitted a detailed proposal for hosting the conference and this was accepted. Three years later, the Steering Committee appointed a local Organising Committee headed by Prof. Anita Bokwa from JU's Institute of Geography and Spatial Management. The Steering Committee then secured honorary patronage for the project from the President of Poland, Mr. Bronisław Komorowski. An Honorary Committee was also established and its invited members included the Mayor of Krakow, Prof Jacek Majchrowski, Rector of the Jagiellonian University, Prof. Wojciech Nowak, President of PAN, Prof. Michał Kleiber, and the President of the International Geographical Union, Prof. Vladimir Kolossov. A design for a graphic identification scheme, i.e. logo, was also developed (Fig. 3).

After 10 years of work, the IGU Regional Conference was held on 18-22 August 2014. Its title "Changes, Challenges, Responsibility" was linked to the main research topics in geography today. Nearly 1400 participants from 64 countries representing all the inhabited continents attended the conference. Naturally, the Polish representation was the largest (ca. 25% of the total or 350 persons) and it was followed by the German (nearly 100),

Japanese (78), Czech (60), UK (58) and Chinese (52) representations. Russia, the US, France and Hungary all sent more than 40 people while Italy, India, Spain, Israel, Finland, South Africa, the Netherlands, ROC, Sweden and Brazil sent more than 20 geographers. Others were represented by between

one participant, like the Bahama Islands, and close to 20 like Switzerland, Canada, South Korea and Australia.

The conference opened on 18 August at the Jagiellonian University's Auditorium Maximumum. Among the important guests and participants who graced the gathering with their presence or addressed the assembly were: Prof. Paweł Swianiewicz, representative of the President of the Republic of Poland, Prof. Jacek Majchrowski, Mayor of the City of Krakow, Prof. Piotr Laidler, JU Deputy Rector for Collegium Medicum, Prof. Marek Chmielewski, Deputy President of PAS, as well as Prof. Marek Degórski, Chairman of the Steering Committee, and the Head of the Organising Committee Prof. Anita Bokwa (Fig. 4).

The official opening ceremony ended with the award presentation ceremony for the gold medallists of the International Geography Olympiad (IGEO). The medals were presented by Dr. Kathryn Berg and Prof. Les Chalmers of the IGEO Committee, acting under the auspices of the IGU, and by Prof. Jacek Majchrowski, Mayor of Krakow (Fig. 5).



**Figure 3.** Logo of the IGU Regional Conference in Krakow



**Figure 4.** Opening of the IGU Regional Conference in Krakow

From left to right: Prof. Anita Bokwa, Chair of the Organising Committee; the City Authority's translator; Prof. Jacek Majchrowski, Mayor of Krakow; Prof. Piotr Laidler, Deputy Rector of JU; Prof. Paweł Swianiewicz, representative of the President of Poland; Prof. Vladimir Kolossov, IGU President; Prof. Marek Chmielewski, PAS Vice-President; Prof. Marek Degórski, Chair of the Steering Committee.



**Figure 5.** Prof. Jacek Majchrowski, Mayor of Krakow, during the IGEO award presentation ceremony

The IGEO was held on 12-18 August immediately before the IGU conference with 36 national teams of secondary school students taking part in the contest. Singapore emerged the team winner while James Mullen of the USA took the first individual prize. The Olympiad was organised by the Pedagogical University of Krakow, which can be proud of the perfect execution of the event.

After a short interlude for a recital of Chopin music by a young virtuoso from Krakow, Mateusz Mateja, Prof. Leszek Kosiński gave his keynote speech on the Relevance of Geography in which he indicated a number of important research topics for geography as a discipline of study.

In the evening, at the end of the day's programme, JU's Collegium Maius opened



**Figure 6.** Opening of the exhibition on "The Development of Geographical Thought in Poland"  
From left to right: Prof. Krzysztof Stopka, Head of the JU Museum, Prof. Piotr Laidler, JU Deputy Rector, Prof. Marek Degórski, Chairman of the Steering Committee, Prof. Vladimir Kolossov, IGU President.

an exhibition "Development of Geographical Thought in Poland" (Fig. 6).

The exhibition introduced the intellectual heritage of Polish geography to the participants in terms of its conceptual development and the equipment used for research. The objective was to make the exhibition accessible and compact enough to be attractive to wider audiences than just the conference participants. During the six months it was open to the public it achieved that target. Prof. Antonii Jackowski of the Jagiellonian University was the initiator and main organiser of the event and he deserves plaudits for his enormous efforts. The exhibition consists of two sections: one – held within the Collegium Maius building - includes research instruments, old maps, atlases and globes (including the priceless globe belonging to the JU Museum) while the other comprises plates on the history of Polish geography displayed in the Professors' Gardens of Collegium Maius (Fig. 7).



**Figure 7.** Jagiellonian Globe (Collection of the JU Museum)

The organisers invited guests of honour to both opening ceremonies who included retired professors of geography from around Poland and relatives of eminent geographers of the past, such as the great grand sons

of Wincenty Pol, the 19th century founder of the first Chair of Geography in Poland, and Prof. med. Zbigniew Pawłowski, son of Prof. Stanisław Pawłowski, the founder of geography in Poznań who was murdered by the Germans at the onset of the Second World War.

The four subsequent days followed the same agenda format with 30 parallel sessions in the morning and afternoon devoted to physical and human aspects of geographical research. The sessions were organised by 41 IGU commissions or by the participants themselves. Among the most prolific contributing commissions were: (I) Dynamics of Economic Spaces: 22 sessions, (II) Geographical Education: 19 and (III) Urban Commission: Urban Challenges in a Complex World: 19. It was noteworthy that the sessions initiated by participants expanded the scope of the conference dictated by the IGU structure. One example out of the 47 participant-initiated sessions was a session organised by Prof. Leszek Starkel and Antoni Jackowski on the history of post-war geographical research in Poland compared to international geography. In total there were 226 presentation sessions that included 1171 presentations. The poster sessions held in parallel involved 227 posters.

In the plenary sessions, held immediately after lunch, invited speakers introduced topics linked to the conference theme "Changes, Challenges, Responsibility". On the second day (19 August), the topic was environmental change, its vectors and rate. In his speech Prof. Benno Werlen addressed traditional and new areas of change within geographers' field of interest. On the third day (20 August), Prof. Zbigniew Kundzewicz and Prof. Gideon Biger provided an opportunity for an exchange of views on worldwide challenges. The speakers stressed both natural and societal aspects of global problems and their strong local repercussions. On the fourth day (21 August), Profs. Julie Winkler and Andreas Faludi attempted to define the extent to which humanity was responsible for the change observed in the megasystem of the geographical environment. Finally (on 22 August), Prof. Andreas Faludi moderated an exciting discussion

between all the panellists and summarised it by indicating the most important research problems in contemporary geography.

Alongside the main agenda there were many other scientific events. Before the start of the conference, six IGU commissions held their meetings and seminars in Warsaw, Krakow and Poznań. Four workshops were held in parallel with the conference, but outside its agenda, including: (I) City without God: origin and change in the religious space in new socialist and post-socialist cities; (II) Modern trends in landscape fragmentation and spatial connectedness; (III) The idea of ecosystem benefits in master planning; and (IV) Presentation skills (for young geographers).

Local excursions have always played an important role in IGU conferences as they offer an opportunity for participants to learn about the local natural and cultural environment. The organisers of the Krakow event recognised that and offered daily trips to the Wieliczka Salt Mines, Auschwitz and the Ojców National Park. Two study trips were also organised, one before and one after the main event, devoted to (I) landscape degradation as a result of strong human impact in Upper Silesia and (II) the natural and cultural qualities of central Poland and their evaluation. Three social events were also organised, including a most prestigious dinner deep in the Wieliczka Salt Mines.

From the purely geographical perspective, the IGU Regional Conference offered Polish geographers an opportunity to showcase their research and skills to a wider audience, while learning about the latest in worldwide research. Many geographical contacts were forged during the events, which could potentially produce joint research endeavours, especially in large international projects, and interesting new publications.

Both international participants and the IGU governing bodies rated the conference very highly. Excellent organisation and the high scientific standards of the sessions were often quoted. All that was possible thanks to the effort and commitment of many people working in the many committees, including the Steering, Organising, IGEO and Exhibition committees and last, but not least the 120 volunteers from eight academic establishments involved directly in running the conference.

Let me take this opportunity to express my sincere gratitude, as Chairman of the Steering Committee, to all those who contributed to our joint success at each stage of the organisation, from its conception to its execution.

Editors' note:

Unless otherwise stated, the sources of tables and figures are the authors' on the basis of their own research.